This book was first published in 1997 in the Collection ‘Scholars Crossing the Centuries’ by Guangxi Educational Press, with the title *The World of Humanism*. It contained articles I had written between 1988 and 1997 in which I reflected on the question of culture. The book showed that the form of these reflections was indeed quite varied: there were essays, in-depth studies and book reviews. The essays were both about general topics and particular cases; the in-depth studies included both short and long articles. Now Peking University Press has offered to publish a revised version of the book, for which I first of all wish to express my gratitude.

By the question of culture that figures here I chiefly refer to the discussion over tradition and modernity, which was the heart of the debate by intellectuals of the New Culture Movement. It was also a hotly disputed topic for intellectuals during the 1980s culture fever. The experience of history shows that the clash of tradition and modernity is a cultural phenomenon that is bound to occur after a modernised county has been galvanised into modernity. In this conflict anti-traditionalism and anti-anti-traditionalism form the basic opposition and source of tension. Now the cultural dispute of the twentieth century from beginning to end revolved around the question of Confucian thought and values. In this field, the author of this book holds a view of culture that wholly affirms Confucian thought and values, which is clearly a stance of anti-anti-traditionalism.

In the last quarter of 1991 I wrote a short piece on the theme “Prospects for the 21st century” for the *21st Century* review. My title was “A Propitious New Start”. It was published in the same review in April 1992. I reproduce it here:

One of the most significant fruits of the May Fourth movement was to make the criticism and denial of Confucian culture an unspoken self-evident and positive value, so that it became the theme and key of the entire twentieth century culture, so much so that anti-traditionalism became the common spiritual legacy of all subsequent intellectuals. From the Moral Revolution of the early Republican era to the ‘Criticising Lin Biao; Criticising Confucius’ of the 1970s, even into the later 80s critique of Confucian culture, all go to show beyond doubt that
the twentieth century cultural movement was subject to the guidance of radicalism. In the space of less than a century, progress, revolution, science and enlightenment were the glamorous slogans. Rejection of tradition became the hallmark of the progress of progressive scholars. All possible flaws in Confucian culture were dug up and exhibited. Healthy and reasonable analysis and peremptory and absurd curses were intermingled, pushing each other to extremes. In the order of twentieth century culture, Confucian thought was left battered and bruised and pushed from the centre to the margins. This was not only the result of the spread of modernity and the influx of Western culture that has been seen on the world scale, it was also something that Chinese intellectuals consciously and deliberately chose for the country and the people.

Yet at least from the Western Zhou up to Confucius, Chinese culture had stabilised and grown out of shamanist consciousness into a unique and mature national consciousness. Confucianism’s strong humanistic-valued rationalism determined the direction and path according to which Chinese culture opened out, shaping the spiritual essence of Chinese culture. This spiritual essence is not something that can be wiped out by the weapons of a few critics. It inner value will not be defeated or fundamentally affected by a temporary utilitarianism. As a spiritual tradition that has lasted for over two thousand years, it has penetrated into all written and oral expressions of culture to become part of the existence of Chinese people. From another perspective, the industrial East Asian economic miracle of the late 1970s fashioned an important challenge to traditional modernisation theory. Academics reflected on the enlightenment attitude and, moved by the rationale of maintaining tradition, set out a supporting philosophy and thought. Moreover, the spread of rationalisation revealed more and more limitations and costs. The result of all this was that even critics of tradition began to realise that there is no need to consider Confucian culture to be a fundamental obstacle to China’s modernisation. The process of modernisation can be effected in a way that does not entail the destruction of tradition. The revision and continuation of tradition along with the reform and consolidation of structures can be integrated in one common process. The destruction of tradition is not only unnecessary for the realisation of modernity, it may even lead to a fragmentation of the value structure and a decline in cultural awareness, resulting in damage to the process by which culture is ordered and shaped. History shows that effective social revolutions of great scope are not able to be realised if they are in radical conflict with the common culture of the members